

Case example 4

Sussex West area meeting

A new strategic view but a slow pace of change

When she first heard of Vibrancy, a trustee of Sussex West area meeting remembers thinking: 'Perhaps it was a bit overegging the pudding, perhaps too much to be expected that we would be "vibrant", when some meetings are just trying to survive.'

The area meeting was struggling to find people to do things, which they knew was a national problem:

I know it's not just us. Vibrancy teaches you that you are not alone with these difficulties. I've come to the conclusion that we'll have to change the way we do things. The way we've done things thus far is quite rigid. It's about getting the balance between rigidity and getting everything necessary done.

Engaging with Vibrancy inspired some changes within the area meeting, but the progress of change felt slow at times, with some ideas for change not yet implemented.

Carrie, the Vibrancy worker for Kent, Surrey and Sussex, had visited the area meeting several times, supporting different individuals and groups, including through a trustee away day. The trustees were in the position where they had 'talked around things a lot without actually making a decision to move forward'.

We felt we were firefighting and doing the necessary minutiae of things that needed to be done and dealing with crises and legal things but as far as vision was concerned we didn't really have any. We also weren't really aware of the need to change.

The trustees decided that the Vibrancy worker was in a good position to facilitate the away day:

We contemplated getting a facilitator from outside but in the end decided Carrie was the best person to do it because she knew most of our issues by that time. She could put a pattern to the day better than a stranger could.

The day was really 'useful' and gave trustees a chance to think strategically:



It was good to have the time to think, 'Where do we want to go? And how do we want to handle things?'

Since the away day, it was felt that the trustee body had 'seen the need to be more strategic'. They also implemented some practical steps to support this, one of which was that in every third trustee meeting they put time aside from the normal agenda to allow for strategic thinking.

Carrie also helped the area meeting to 'look wider than just our area meeting at how other people organise things'. She set up a meeting with neighbouring area meetings to discuss the possibilities offered by property trusts and other collaborative structures, so that 'we have less jobs in our area meeting and can concentrate on the other things about Quakerism, like being vibrant!'

However, progress after the away day was patchy. The Trustees were not able to carry forward many of the ideas that came out of the away day about how they 'want to be' and how they 'want the area meeting to carry on':

We came away really invigorated and enthusiastic for effecting change. But this has somewhat diminished under pressure of other immediate local issues. It can also be hard to take people with you and that sometimes puts a bit of a brake on change.

A trustee reflected that sometimes change does not happen as quickly as she would like it to:

I find it hard to always be Quakerly and take people with me when I want to change. I want us to be more decisive and change a bit more easily but it doesn't happen like that.

Even with a slow pace of change, it was acknowledged that new thinking and new ideas from Vibrancy support had been helpful to the area meeting:

Carrie's definitely made a huge difference to our area meeting. Before her, I wasn't aware of other ways of organising things. If you're not aware of other ways then you don't look for them. Since Carrie we've actually contemplated these new things.

Some in the meeting were conscious of being 'in danger of relying on Carrie to come up with solutions'. But the positive side of this was that people were starting to see Carrie as a 'support mechanism to us making our own change'. There was a feeling that the area meeting would continue to move towards change at the pace that worked for the meeting, and that Vibrancy had planted some seeds of possible new ways of being.

Now I like the term Vibrancy, it's a good word. It's unusual but it describes what we need to become.



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